

How Does Grace Show Itself?

Grace has a thrilling sound To each believer's ear; That peace with God through Christ is found Is news I gladly hear. This is the first verse to one of our hymns. Grace has a thrilling sound. Grace is a word that we speak of often in our church. And I bet, that if I were to ask any one of you here this morning, you could tell me what grace is, right? Grace is God's undeserved love. All of our lives as Christians we learn and relearn what Grace is. But, there aren't too many times when we speak about what grace *does*. And indeed it does many things. This morning we ask the question: "How Does Grace Show itself?"

As we read the words before us here in Romans ten and eleven, we see that first of all, it finds the lost. The apostle Paul quotes Isaiah: *''Rom. 10:20 And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me" ''*. Notice what God's word says. We were lost. It wasn't just difficult for us to find Jesus and salvation. We weren't looking. No, instead, because we couldn't find him, he found us. Jesus took away our sins and gave us the gift of faith.

This is a simple message to hear, isn't it? It would be just fine if we were to just leave these words alone and rejoice and accept them. But we can't leave them alone, can we? Inside every one of us there is a part of us that would like to earn or buy God's favor instead of receiving it as a free gift. Sometimes we hear this voice from the outside, don't we? We hear it from TV or from our friends or coworkers. They tell that Jesus died for our sins and took them away, but we aren't off the hook. We still have to *do* something. We still have to choose him and invite him into our hearts. Or we have to do good works to help Jesus. But, notice what Paul says about that. First he quotes Isaiah: *"I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."* God does not expect us to choose him because he knows that we are unable to choose him. Instead *he* chooses *us*. Or again, listen to what Paul says: *''5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. ''* We can't buy salvation by choosing him. And we can't buy salvation by doing good things to please him. Grace is God's undeserved love. Grace is God's love for us alone. If we try to add anything to that it destroys it. You wouldn't drink water that had a little poison in it right? Let's say that I gave you a glass of water and told you that it only a tenth of it was cyanide. Would you drink that? Why then would you add something to God's grace?

But, for many of us, sitting here this morning, our sinful nature isn't that bold and obvious. Our sinful natures know that we don't get into heaven by choosing or earning or buying God. So then, our sinful natures try a different tactic. They try and convince us that grace is something worth forgetting. I owed a debt I could not pay. Jesus paid a debt he did not owe. Who cares? I hear about that fact every Sunday. And that's just the point. We hear about that fact that God loved us. He loved the unlovable. He forgave the guilty. That fact should fill us with joy. Instead, it moves us to yawn. It is only when we see our sin and its corruption that we finally get grace. It's only when we speak as Paul did 'I am the chief of sinners' that we start to understand grace.

Grace is God's undeserved love. It shows itself by finding the lost. But in these words it shows itself in a different way: *21 But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."* One of my professors once described what it was like for himself to go on vacation. He would go and visit his sister and her family. He would show up at the door. His sister would answer the door and give him a hug. He then would see his nephew and his niece behind her at the other side of the room. And with warm, inviting words, he told them 'Come here and give your uncle a hug.' And then nothing happens. He looks into their eyes, and in one child he sees fear and in the other he sees hatred. And so, he tells them again 'come on, give your uncle a hug.' At first it's awkward. Then it's insulting. Then, it's just plain embarrassing. How long will he wait? When will they give in and show their uncle any sign of love or affection? The LORD held out his arms to his people not for minutes, but for centuries. And what was the result? They hated him. He held out his arms and they ran from him.

If you live long enough on the earth, you see this. If you live long enough, you see people who had Jesus. They had God's grace in its fullness. They knew that God had forgiven their sins. But, then they took it for granted.

Then they even grew to despise it. Then the idea of coming to church and growing in their faith grew burdensome and even offensive. Finally, as much as God wanted to wrap his loving arms around them, they ended up hating him.

These horrible examples humble us, don't they? These examples teach us to value this gift of God's grace, don't they? They move us to pray: 'LORD, do not let me go down that path! Never let me tire of hearing that word 'grace'. Never let me add anything to that word or take away anything from it.' Grace shows itself by contrast. It shows how pure and right it is when people despise it and reject it.

So then, my brothers and sisters, continue to be thankful for and surprised at that word, grace. Live your lives in humility, since you know that you once were lost, but now Jesus has found you. Live your lives appreciating what grace has done in your life. For grace does show itself. It shows itself by finding the lost. It finds itself by humbling the found. Amen.